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SUBJECT: SHANGHAI EDITORS INCREASE U.S. NEWS COVERAGE AS RESULT OF IV EXPERIENCE

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. During an April 18 lunch hosted by the President of the Shanghai Youth Daily, four senior editors from the paper who had recently returned from an International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) reported that they came back from their IVLP trip with overwhelmingly positive views of the United States. As a result of the trip, they had begun to incorporate more news about the United States in the newspaper. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Four senior editors from the Shanghai Youth Daily, the mouthpiece of the Shanghai Communist Youth League (circ. 400,000), recently returned from a March 2007 International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) with wholly positive views of the United States. The participants in the Single-Country IVLP entitled "The Role of a Free Press in a Democratic Society" included the Executive Deputy Editor-in-Chief, the Head of the Comprehensive News Section, the Editor of the Political News Section, and the Editor of the Domestic and International News Section, all of whom had recently been promoted into their new positions and were ideally suited to take maximum advantage of their first-ever visit to the U.S.

¶3. (SBU) The four usually staid editors were anxious to regale the Shanghai Public Affairs Officer (PAO) with tales of their U.S. visit at a lunch hosted by the President of the Shanghai Youth Daily shortly after their return on April 18. They were bubbling over with enthusiasm about their trip around the United States and fairly bursting with positive impressions of people they had met and places they had visited. The morning before the luncheon, the four had conducted a lengthy briefing of their fellow journalists and editors at the Shanghai Youth Daily, a requirement imposed by their Editor-in-Chief on anyone who travels overseas. Not only did the four speak about their experiences and the contacts they had made, but they showed a photo montage they created of the places they had visited - Washington, DC, New York, Tampa, Dallas and San Francisco - and also passed around hard copies of dozens of newspapers they had collected from around the U.S. They recounted how they had to mail the newspapers back to themselves at considerable expense, but were willing to do so because they felt strongly that hard copies were "so much more useful as references than the online versions anyone can read."

¶4. (SBU) The four editors reported that they had read up on the

U.S. before their journey, including Alexis de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America" (in Chinese), but they described their IV trip as a "seeing-is-believing tour of the U.S." They said the trip "helped turn their abstract views about the U.S. government, society and culture that they learned from books into vivid pictures." They said that before they visited the U.S., they viewed its history as far too short (in comparison with China's) to be worthy of much attention, but they were deeply impressed with how America has succeeded in preserving its history and how average Americans are dedicated to respecting the past. For example, they were struck by the number of monuments America has to its past and how widely visited they are, whereas China, in their words, has done a poor job of preserving its past and its few monuments are in shabby condition and rarely visited.

¶15. (SBU) The editors also reported that they were deeply moved to have an opportunity to see with their own eyes how "advanced and civilized" American society was and how deeply ingrained the respect for the rule of law was in American society. This was something they had heard about before going to the United States, but having seen American society in action, they commented that "this is one area where China can definitely learn from the U.S." They were excited to have visited several American newspapers and had a chance to meet with their professional counterparts, both at large nationally influential newspapers and at small, local papers. They were also struck by the power of the American economy - "imagine how much economic strength is contained in that one narrow Wall Street" - and saw firsthand the flood of made-in-China products on the American market. They commented that it was impossible to find souvenirs for their families that weren't "made in China."

¶16. (SBU) The trip also appeared to have led to some positive changes in Shanghai Youth Daily's coverage of U.S. news. Almost immediately on their return, they set about revising the layout

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of the Shanghai Youth Daily to incorporate more news about the U.S. on a daily basis, a move their Editor-in-Chief heartily welcomed and that bodes well for enhanced U.S.-China mutual understanding.

¶17. (SBU) Comment: While we have no illusions that one visit to the U.S. will bring a free press to China overnight, the IV program clearly has helped to improve the image of the United States among a key group. After their IV trip, the four clearly had a better understanding of the United States and an appreciation of the importance to China of good relations with the United States.

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